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Democratic Response to Yonkers State of the City Address

Good Evening.

This year the Mayor delivered his State of the City address on the eve of tomorrow's Green Conference and our ninth annual Business Week.

This delicate and important balance between environmental protection and economic growth will allow Yonkers to experience a renaissance on all fronts.

In recent weeks, the Council landmarked a small block in the downtown to help preserve Yonkers historic past and held its first public hearing on SFC's proposal to transform downtown Yonkers.

These actions by the Council send a clear message that both historic preservation and environmental sensitivity are complementary forces that support economic development, tourism and "smart growth."

We want to see a vibrant and exciting downtown with people on the street to support the restaurants and shops, with jobs and housing opportunities for people of all economic strata and educational levels.

We want to see tax revenues generated to support our ever-improving public schools, our infrastructure of roads and sewers, and our police and fire professionals. One proposed way to rebuild our aging infrastructure is through Tax Increment Financing where private investors fund improvements without raising the City's overall debt. The Council will continue to hold public discussions on the TIF proposal.

While we must be creative to support those who invest in Yonkers, we can not mortgage our future to those who stand to make millions in our City. We must be vigilant to make certain that the City recaptures its public investment.

Democrats believe we should provide all of the subsidy that is required to spark economic activity, but only the subsidy that is needed.

Only by working with the citizens of Yonkers in a transparent way will the Mayor and the Council be able to provide the essential services at a cost that people can afford.

While it is necessary to plan for tomorrow, we must deal realistically with the budgetary challenges that confront us today.

One simply has to go food shopping or fill up a car with gas to experience first-hand how expensive everyday items have become.

The state government is confronting significant shortfalls and continues to make hard but necessary financial choices. Our hard working state delegation legislators and new Governor came through for Yonkers this year but we have been warned that next year could be worse.

Closer to home, the ever decreasing real estate market resulted in a significant decrease of revenues for the City from property transfer taxes and city income and sales taxes. To deal with our current situation, we need to spend less.

Unfortunately, the Mayor has proposed a budget that once again relies on one-shot deals to balance the budget rather than employing prudent solutions. He proposes to reduce the fund balance by 51% and barely requires us to tighten our belts. A low fund balance costs taxpayers money as we have had to borrow money just to meet payroll because of cash flow issues related to when we receive money from taxpayers and the state. This poor planning has cost the taxpayers \$1.5 million in interest on short term debt.

With the State experiencing financial pains, we cannot count on it to help us next year at the same level of aid provided to us this year. Because of this the Council is concerned that we will run out of money next year as the Mayor warns that we are headed for a cliff.

Our growing long term debt is even more disconcerting. The City has incurred a debt of close to \$500 million, which is more than a 100% increase during the Mayor's tenure. Another \$98 million is proposed in the upcoming capital budget cycle, which will raise our annual interest expense to more than \$27 million dollars.

The Council will be starting its budget hearings in just over a week. Once again, police overtime expenditures are running \$10 million dollars over budget. The Mayor expects to release a new set of procedures in about a month. This should have happened months ago. We asked about this last year at our budget hearings and when we confirmed the Police Commissioner. We need to see the plan now.

During these critical budget hearings and throughout the year we will demand that each commissioner and director run his or her part of government more efficiently and provide us with a detailed accounting of all overtime expenditures where applicable. And while we should avoid short-term cuts with adverse long term consequences, we need to identify areas where we can safely cut the budget. While no one wants lay-offs, tight fiscal times could necessitate some workforce changes. One quick action would be to get rid of those gas-guzzling city-owned SUVs that are emblematic of a government insensitive to the taxpayers and insensitive to the environment.

Ultimately, Democrats believe that the taxpayers of Yonkers will support a government that delivers quality services without waste. We have come a long way. Test scores in our schools are rising with smaller class sizes, universal Pre-K and great teachers who care about their

students. Our children's participation in music, arts and sports are providing them with healthy bodies to go with their healthy minds. Our uniformed professionals have achieved high levels of public safety while other city departments have provided great parks and started recycling initiatives that improve the quality of life for this generation and future generations.

Again, Democrats believe that the City should provide the residents of Yonkers all of the government that is required, but only the government that is needed.

It is an honor and a pleasure to work with Majority Leader Sandy Annabi; Minority Leader Liam McLaughlin and our newest Council member Joan Gronowski in addition to Council members Patricia McDow, Dee Barbato and John Murtagh. All seven council members work together with the Mayor and the many volunteer boards -- all for the good of the City.

As we work through these difficult times, the Council will continue to ensure that our downtown revitalization and the budget process are transparent and have significant public input. Together we will arrive at solutions that address today's needs while setting the stage for a prosperous tomorrow.

Our best days are yet to come. A great city deserves nothing less.

Thank you and good night.